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African Women of the Screen at the Digital Turn

A Special Report by Beti Ellerson, Centre for the Study and Research of African Women in Cinema

Introduction

When I conceptualised the *Sisters of the Screen* project as a book and film, I envisioned an "imagined community" of kindred spirits, a "sisterhood" where the screen was their ultimate point of convergence. The screen is where their images are read; whether it's a movie screen, television set, video monitor, computer screen, tablet or mobile phone, for a director, producer, film festival organiser, actor, critic or spectator the screen is the ultimate site where the moving image is viewed, interpreted and understood.

With the phenomenal development of screen culture as a result of the digital turn, I return to the "screen" as a conceptual framework that integrates screen media, and their associated devices and technologies; hence, the concept "African women of the screen" as the organising principle. This report examines the impact of the digital turn on African women of the screen, how their cinematic gaze has evolved, developed and transformed with the evolution of new technologies such as the Internet and, in particular, the emergence of social media.

The notion of cinema as a film projected on a big screen viewed by large audiences in dedicated venues has never been the frame within which African women have navigated as image-makers, and it no longer is the dominant modality in the age of new media, video on demand, video streaming and transmedial platforms. Thus, African women find themselves well positioned to take full advantage of the global screen culture that has emerged during the first decades of the twenty-first century, and with it the technological, social and cultural transformation and evolution that it brings.

My focus on African women of the screen and their engagement with social media as a tool to advance their interests as practitioners and stakeholders considers the role played by online communities in the myriad processes of storytelling, and the extent that it has transformed their imaginary. My research on African women in the diverse areas of screen culture has explored the modes in which they have evolved as cultural producers and cultural readers from the early age of celluloid, when the screen was fashioned from a white cloth, to the age of the tablet and mobile phone, where the image can be manipulated with a touch of the screen.

Thus, my research considers questions such as: to what extent have new technologies

contributed to African women's visibility as practitioners, the accessibility of their work and their ability to achieve a level of networking that keeps them connected and allows them to perfect their craft? How have they been empowered by these new systems of communication, and how have these structures enhanced collaborative efforts and networks? How do millennials, who were born and came of age with these new technologies, navigate these tools in comparison to the pioneers who emerged in the 1960s and 1970s long before these new media, when celluloid and analogue video were standard and when the movie theatre space and the television set were the sole point of focus, when interaction with these visual apparatuses was a one-way process between the viewer and the image? How, now, do the predigital and postdigital practitioners coalesce, negotiate and understand each other?

The advent and proliferation of the Internet has played a significant role in the realisation and concretisation of many concepts and ideas that have been integral to African-women-in-cinema discourse since the emergence of the African Women in Cinema movement in the early 1990s. My work, which revolves around the Centre for the Study and Research of African Women in Cinema, is an example of these successes. Its mission statement declares:

> As the virtual environment becomes an increasingly prominent means for disseminating ideas, influencing attitudes and educating and understanding people and cultures, the Centre has positioned itself as an important player in formulating discourse and developing paradigms in terms of African women and screen culture. As technology advances in the twenty-first century, the Centre as forerunner in innovative networking and cutting-edge research will play an even greater role. ("Mission")

A virtual environment with a website as its point of convergence, the Centre maintains constitutive components via the "African Women in Cinema" blog, *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Pinterest*, *Academia.edu*, and channels on *YouTube*, *Vimeo* and *Dailymotion*.

The "African Women in Cinema" blog serves as a global newsletter with regular posts composed of interviews, reviews, critical essays, listings of exhibitions, festivals and conferences, conference proceedings, crowdsourcing and other funding information and sources, online petitions, embedded trailers or links to films, and current events.

The digital Centre and its social media network is inspired by and draws from the proposals and demands emerging out the "African Women of the Image" professional network that formed in the early 1990s. At FESPACO (Panafrican Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou / Festival panafricain du cinéma et de la télévision de Ouagadougou) in 1991, part of the festival platform was organised under the title "Women, Cinema, Television and Video in Africa". The events of this meeting set the foundation of what would become the visual media network of UPAFI (Pan-African Union of Women in the Image Industry/L'Union panafricaine des femmes de l'image).

In interviews with African women in the diverse areas of cinema that I conducted in the late 1990s, during which we discussed the formation of the professional network, they talked about the problems around organising and the tremendous challenge of communication, follow-up and networking outside of the boundaries of festivals and conferences, when they go back to

their respective countries.[1] Members of African Women in Cinema are scattered throughout the world, which can make it a formidable task to establish professional connections and follow up contacts.

In addition, the interviewees highlighted some of the problems that come with trying to get organised within such a large field: notably language barriers and travelling. Even to come together regionally was a formidable task. Some of the obstacles related to allotting limited funding for making films, maintaining a household and keeping contact with other women in the region. Often the latter was given the lowest priority.

During these meetings and through studies spanning some twenty-five years, a multitude of strategies have been proposed by African Women in Cinema:

- Empowerment of women using a variety of approaches.
- Organising around issues that are relevant to African women's needs.
- Networking through continent-wide links and with other relevant partners.
- Outreach by developing activities or programmes to access more women potentially interested in the moving image and parallel areas.
- Mentorship as a tool for women's development.
- Role modelling using the visibility of successful women and representations of strong or inspiring women through the moving image.
- Sharing information, ideas and tips via workshopping, volunteering and blogging.
- Informing: spreading information through various outlets.
- Information gathering and dissemination through research, databases, the Internet.
- Providing access to information networks through resource locations.
- Archiving: storing information for research and consultation.
- Showcasing women's accomplishment and experiences through film festivals, cineclubs and innovative film screenings followed by discussion.
- Consciousness-raising through cinema.
- Nurturing: developing, encouraging, cultivating and promoting skills.
- Orientation into cinema through purposeful recruitment.
- Sponsorship through fundraising and grant writing.
- Career development: fostering the careers of women of the moving image through master classes, advanced workshops and motivational speakers.
- Research: screen studies criticism and analysis.
- Training: professional training in all aspects of the moving image and new media.
- Advocacy and activism using cinema and screen culture as a tool for social change.

The broad reach of the Internet and digital technologies via social media—*Facebook*, *Twitter*, crowdfunding, video sharing, instant messaging, blogging and online video chat—has been transformative in terms of African women's access to information, ability to network, to cross language barriers and, most importantly, to be agents of knowledge production as it relates to African realities. Hence, the tools of new technologies are particularly conducive to the implementation of the strategies listed above.

Videosharing, Video Streaming and Video-on-Demand

The dearth of distribution and exhibition possibilities for African films is one of the most frequently expressed concerns after lack of infrastructure and the cost of production. For women, these issues are heightened by the insufficiency of solid networks and, unfortunately, an absence of a genuine interest in their work and the themes of their films on the part of distributors or a broader spectatorship. In the case of distributors who are committed to presenting diverse voices, Debra Zimmerman, the director of the emblematic New York-based organisation Women Make Movies, had this to say in an interview with the Center for Media and Social Impact:

> We're much more interested in seeing films made by African women about African issues. But the truth is that sometimes the films that they make are not really easy to market to a US audience because they're speaking from a position of within. And it is easier for Americans to hear an American voice talking about what's going on in Africa then they are in an African voice. Generally that's when we say yes we will pick it up, even though we know that our job's going to be harder. But in the way we believe that women should tell their own stories, we believe that Africans should tell their own stories.

Increasingly, with the emergence of video hosting services such as *YouTube, Vimeo* and *Dailymotion*, African women have the ability to disseminate their own stories, or at least to get the word out that their stories exist. Through the user-generated, free and easily accessible features of video-hosting sites, African women makers are able to upload teasers, samples of their work or entire films to be viewed privately.

Video sharing is an important tool for promoting trailers for films, announcements for events and short introductory bio-interviews. Moreover, films are increasingly accessible in their entirety on video-on-demand and streaming sites. For Belgian-Congolese Monique Mbeka Phoba, the video-sharing platform played a vital role in the production and promotion of her film *Between the Cup and the Election* (*Entre la coupe et élection,* Monique Mbeka Phoba and Guy Kabeya, 2007). She had this to say:

> Evolution in terms of technology … has had quite an influence on how we work … This kind of virtual interactivity led to a film about the first Black African soccer team in the 1974 World Cup. Guy Kabeya and I put a preview trailer on the Internet and received responses from all sorts of people interested in such a film, especially at the eve of the World Cup to be hosted in South Africa. This demonstrates the important role that the Internet may play in the production and promotion of films, which was not the case some years ago. It was the result of showing the trailer through video sharing that people were aware of the existence of the film—a very effective promotional tool.

French-owned *Dailymotion* hosts a diversity of work by francophone African women, though this same group also uses *YouTube* and *Vimeo*. In addition to user-generated content on the *Dailymotion* site, interviews, tele-news, event coverage and bio-documentary series (such as Africa24 and TV5 Monde+ Afrique) also feature francophone African women. For instance, the

audiovisual coverage of the tribute to African women filmmakers at the 2010 FIFF (Festival International de Films de Femmes) is accessible on *Dailymotion*, as well as the TV5 Monde report of the 40 years of Francophone Women Filmmaker colloquium in Paris in 2012: Les réalisatrices africaines 40 ans de cinéma, and the TV5 Monde report on the all-women presidents of the main juries of FESPACO 2013.

Of the three video-hosting services discussed above, *YouTube,* with a phenomenal global reach, has by far the largest user base of African women and the greatest number of accessible videos.

The scope of the Centre's African Women in Cinema (AWC) Channel on *YouTube* demonstrates the extent of its possibilities. The playlist feature, a tool to organise videos available on the *YouTube* platform, is a central feature of the AWC Channel. Hence, the thematic AWC Channel playlist serves as a repository of links to works by or about African women. Playlists are a very useful resource for research, as any *YouTube* search of works by and about African women listed on the AWC channel will also feature the AWC playlist, thus familiarising more potential viewers with the works of African women. Moreover, when a selected video is in play, on the right column of the website a thumbnail listing of related videos is visible. While the majority of the videos on this list are only vaguely related, if at all, the feature has been a valuable source for the AWC channel to discover other works by women.

While the social-media platform *Pinterest* has not attracted many African Women in Cinema users, its feature may prove to be a useful tool because of its eye-catching format. A portfolio of sorts, the site is arranged as a series of boards on which to "pin" content. The theme-based AWC boards offer followers and other interested viewers a visual presentation of relevant topics. While similar to the grid format of the *YouTube* playlist, the site offers in addition a transmedial environment in which to peruse the related boards that are linked to books, articles, interviews—written and filmed—websites, blogs, photos and other sources. In addition, one may "pin" content from boards of other *Pinterest* users, hence broadening the circle of interested cohorts.

In addition to video-sharing websites, many African women filmmakers incorporate film excerpts and entire short films in their own websites. In many cases the websites are extensive, elaborating on future projects, and expounding on their philosophy as artists. To highlight a few among an impressive list: Angèle Diabang, Nadia el Fani, Françoise Ellong, Izza Génini, Wanuri Kahui, Sam Kessie, Salem Mekuria, Branwen Okpako.

Film Festivals

Film festival websites have been valuable sources for viewing trailers or teasers as promotional strategies for films that are part of the current festival or that have been screened in the past. The African Film Festival New York, founded and organised by Sierra Leonean Mahen Bonetti, is an excellent example of the invaluable resources that are accessible via the Internet that may benefit African cultural producers. Moreover, Mahen Bonetti's success highlights African women's increasingly visible presence as film festival organisers, demonstrating the

advocacy role that they take on to create the requisite infrastructures for promoting African cultural production. As the historical women's forum at FESPACO revealed, the film festival has played an important role in promotion, exhibition, marketing and training and as local and regional conduits around which women may interconnect continentally and globally. As it is simultaneously a meeting place for pitching, workshopping and sharing ideas, it is often a pivotal space where African women may network and outreach throughout the continent and beyond.

These film festivals and meeting places, both women-focused spaces and cultural milieus created by women, have mechanisms set in place for the kinds of activities necessary for the organisation, analysis and archiving of information, as the events, meetings and activities are often recorded and filmed, biographies, artists' statements and filmographies amassed, and newsletters and catalogues and directories published, all foundational components for the acquisition of resources and data collections. These initiatives demonstrate the genuine effort to globalise the experiences of African women in cinema and their potential as information-gathering strategies, for opening avenues for access to informational networks and for creating archival sources for research and consultation. TAZAMA (Congo-Brazzaville), UDADA International Film Festival (Kenya) and IIFF International Images Film Festival for Women (Zimbabwe) are examples of African women-focused institutions that promote, highlight and give coverage of their events through social media.

The Growing Popularity of Webseries

The success of Senegalese American Issa Rae's *The Mis-Adventures of Awkward Black Girl* webseries has put the spotlight on the potential of this platform for underrepresented populations, in particular women of African descent, to have their content viewed and supported by large audiences, knowing that there is a viewership interested in the experiences that they present. Inspired by Issa Rae, Ghanaian Nicole Amarteifio followed in her footsteps with the *An African City* webseries. Both US-based makers benefit from an eager audience among the sizable population of people of African descent in the US. In addition, *An African City*'s majority US-based characters attract an enthusiastic continental African audience sympathetic to the return-to-the-source storyline of five young women who, after living abroad, return "home" to Ghana.

Issa Rae had this to say about *YouTube,* the video-sharing platform on which she piloted her webseries:

> If it weren't for *YouTube,* I would be extremely pessimistic … *YouTube* has revolutionized content creation. If it weren't for *YouTube,* I would still be at studios trying to convince executives that Awkward Black Girls really do exist … If it weren't for social media, I don't know that black women would even be a fully formed blip on the radar. (46)

The production of *The Mis-Adventures of Awkward Black Girl* followed a successful crowdfunding campaign to finance its series beyond the sixth episode; drawing upon the significant support base and audience it had already built with an average of 60,000 viewers. *The Mis-Adventures of Awkward Black Girl*'s cheeky character, played by Issa Rae, and Rae's

sardonic approach to the making of the series garnered much curiosity, admiration and, hence, support. At the time a student at Stanford University, she wrote the script, gathered friends to participate as crew, borrowed a camera from the university library, shot, edited and posted the film on *Facebook*, and watched in amazement at the response.

On the continent, there is no shortage of African-based webseries with comparable success among viewers both in Africa and in the global diaspora. The francophone webseries *Ina* by Valérie Kaboré (Burkina Faso), *Monia et Rama* by Apolline Traoré (Burkina Faso), *Ma Famille* by Akissa Delta (Côte d'Ivoire), *Un Mari pour deux soeurs* by Marie-Louise Asseu (Côte d'Ivoire), and *Nafi* by Eugénie Ouattara (Côte d'Ivoire) are examples of the proliferation of this genre whose ever-growing popularity is due in large part to its accessibility on video-sharing platforms such as *YouTube* and *Dailymotion* and Internet television sites.

Crowdsourcing Practices

Fundraising, sponsoring and partnerships have always been fundamental to the financing of independent films and projects. Hence, online crowdsourcing, heralded as a breakthrough in film funding practices, provides a unique opportunity for an online community of stakeholders to participate in the funding and promotion of a project. And while collective fundraising strategies have always existed, online crowdfunding is much less expensive and labour intensive and hence more conducive to the needs of underrepresented groups who have fewer funding options and who generally attract less interest in their projects.

Online crowdfunding "closes the funding gap for women", asserts Ruth Simon in an article in the *Wall Street Journal*. Simon also notes that according to crowdfunding advocates, their sites "democratize access to capital". How then do African women filmmakers fare using this strategy? Several have been successful in raising needed funds to complete their films, and while others may not have attained their intended goal, they have been able to garner support and enthusiasm and establish an online community of potential backers for their next project. In addition, the extensive description detailing the objectives of the crowdfunding campaign provides a means for viewers to become familiar with the proposed project. Moreover, it may be used as a barometer to gauge audience engagement. The non-success in reaching the projected goal is not always an indicator of lack of interest by potential supporters; it may be indicative of weaknesses in pitching the project, of unrealistic goals or the lack of momentum and sustained energy in keeping the project idea alive. It has been said that a crowdfunding campaign is a full time effort requiring frequent connections across media; hence, the necessity of maintaining an ongoing presence on *Facebook*, *Twitter* and other networks to keep the word "out there".

During the successful campaigns of Monique Mbeka Phoba's *Soeur Oyo* (2014) and of Yaba Badoe's *The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo* (2014), to name only two, the strategies that led to their success were outreach, connecting and follow-up. *Twitter* profiles and *Facebook* pages were teeming with constant dialogue with fans, friends, and friends of friends, keeping the momentum going, giving updates on the funding goal, asking again and again for support.

Yaba Badoe, who had completed the filming stage of her project and sought funds for

postproduction costs, had this to say:

> a close friend of ours, Margo Okazawa-Rey, suggested that instead of waiting for funding from grant-giving bodies, who tend to have their own agendas on the sort of films they want made, we should try crowdsourcing to raise funds to complete *The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo*. Margo agreed to lead our Indiegogo campaign. We aim to raise $45,000 from a network of friends, family, well wishers and lovers of African women's writing, so that we can edit and complete the film. We've had an amazing response to our campaign … Friends are pointing us in the right direction; they're spreading the word about the film; and most important of all, firing us up with enthusiasm to finish what we set out to do.

By following Monique Mbeka Phoba's *Soeur Oyo Facebook* page over the span of the film production, one was placed right in the midst of the daily process, experiencing the ups and downs, the passion and enthusiasm of the entire team. The Kisskissbankbank crowdsourcing campaign was equally gripping, the final days were pumped with excitement and suspense as Monique and supporters pursued funders in order to reach the targeted goal. She had this to say about the role of social media in the making of *Soeur Oyo*:

> Completely overwhelmed by these challenges, I was actually helped by people on *Facebook*: The film was practically coproduced on *Facebook*. At times I really expressed all my distress... And there are the people who turn their backs, refusing to help when you talk to them face to face. But who do so when they read about it on *Facebook* … I got some great photos of the families … from *Facebook* contacts. It was there also that I discovered the young girl who was dub singer of the lead actress … Aude Hitier, a French woman who I met on *Facebook*, is the designer of this gorgeous poster, which is based on the images from the film ... and with *Facebook*, too, I had a flying start with my crowdfunding campaign: forty-one percent of the goal I set was reached in less than two weeks of the launching, it's amazing.

While the projects of Monique Mbeka Phoba and Yaba Badoe are very interesting examples, other projects that did not reach their goal are no less compelling. And while I do not have in-depth analysis for the reasons, it may well have to do with the power of their campaign strategy. Amy Dunn Muscoco outlines three elements that lead to successful crowdfunding by women: social media skills, teamwork and networking. The second and third have been ongoing objectives during African Women in Cinema gatherings and, with the ubiquity of social media platforms, the first will take a prominent role and, hence, reinforce the others.

On the Continent: African Women's Experiences with Evolving Technologies

Reflecting on African women's access to technology and facilities to allow them to work more efficiently and effectively, UK-based British-Nigerian Ngozi Onwurah observed in a 1997 interview that there are significant disparities in budgets, facilities and technologies between African women living on the continent and in the West, and that distinctions are not sufficiently emphasised in discourse within the broader focus on "African women in cinema" as a group.

Two decades later, one may ask to what extent has the playing field been levelled with the emergence of digital technologies purported to close the gap between "the haves and the have-nots", as a result of less expensive and more user-friendly modes of production, the relative ease of communication, and the facility of global exchange.

Though there has definitely been an impact on productions as a result of new media, women on the continent have always looked for strategies to overcome the technological gap. Burkinabé Franceline Oubda emphasised the financial benefits of using alternatives to celluloid film, notably video, which highlights the fact that women cinéastes are always willing to experiment with whatever tools allow them to tell their stories. She had this to say in a 1997 interview:

> Video is much less expensive, it is practical, and we are able to show much more of our work to the public … You see filmmakers that since the beginning of their career have never been able to complete their films, whereas, during this same time, those of us who use video are doing a maximum amount of films … I think we should turn towards the means that are more accessible.

Moreover, as is evident in the name Media 2000, the production company founded by Burkinabé Valerie Kaboré in the mid-1990s, Kaboré was forward-looking, preparing for the new millennium by providing the technological tools to local productions.

Since the millennium, cultural institutions equipped with training facilities have proliferated on the continent, with women participating in record numbers. Often mentored by their pioneering elders, women of the Millennial and X Generations, comfortable with new technologies, connected to the global African diaspora and digital networks, are playing a vital role in local, regional and continental initiatives. Institutes and programmes such as the Media Centre of Dakar and the Masters programme in Documentary Cinema Studies run by the University of Gaston Berger in Saint Louis—both in Senegal—and the Institut Imagine in Burkina Faso have attracted women, who, after completing their training, returned to their communities to collaborate in initiatives made possible through new technologies. Senegalese filmmaker and producer Angèle Diabang, who studied at the Media Centre of Dakar, created Karoninka Productions in 2006 and is involved in many initiatives locally and further afield. Burkinabé filmmaker Laurentine Bayala, who graduated from the University of Gaston Berger, is at the forefront of new media developments in Burkina Faso. She was a guest speaker at the second forum of InnovAfrica in December 2010, is a contributor to the online Technology of Information and Development Portal, an avid blogger at NetLog, is at the head of the dynamic online TV Wagues and also works as a researcher and organizer.

In Dakar, Senegal, Fatou Kandé Senghor is founder of Waru Studios, an experimental lab for interdisciplinary artistic research; using new technologies, the lab works at the intersection of art, science, ecology, and politics. Senegalese-Martinican Maria Kâ, who trained in France and the US, is the driving force behind the Dakar-based production company Picture Box. Burkinabé Apolline Traoré, who also trained in the United States, brought her skills back to Burkina Faso and is actively involved in its vibrant cinema culture.

The Ouagadougou-based Institut Imagine, founded by renowned Burkinabé filmmaker Gaston Kaboré, has emerged as an important venue for film training and production. Young women from across the continent have been selected to participate in the intensive workshops. For instance, Yetnayet Bahru from Ethiopia, having already made the popular film *He Didn't Call* (*Aldewolem,* 2008), enrolled there for additional training. Nigerian founder and organiser of the African Student Film Festival, Adaobi Obiegbosi, who completed courses at the Institute, wanted to create a continental platform for African film students to share their work and ideas, leading to the inaugural African Student Film Festival (ASFF) in 2012.

Africa, Diaspora and the Global Millennial Generation

While the designation "millennials" emerged in the US to describe the generation born between 1981 and 1997, it has expanded in literature and discourse to embrace a cohort of people worldwide, born during the age of the Internet (Fry). The rise of globalisation and the expansion of an international diaspora have been fundamental to the identity of African millennials as a group. Hence, to frame this generation of African millennials in the broader scope of the digital age provides insight into the extent to which new technologies have influenced the screen culture of African women. Millennials between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four constitute a group born during the emergence of the Internet, touched by the ubiquity of digital technologies and the flow, exchange and influences of global African diasporas.

While transnationalism has historically been the experience of many African women in cinema, the flow of languages, ideas and information facilitated by online networks and communities is a distinguishing feature of this generation of makers. No longer working in isolation, hampered by the impediments of distance and the difficulties of communication experienced by the pioneering generation, the multitude of new media platforms allows for continuous, spontaneous connectivity across the globe. "Face-to-face" conversations via Skype, instantaneous dialogue with *Facebook* friends, fans and groups and up-to-the-minute *Twitter* feeds enable direct networking after having met at a conference or film festival, rather than only reconnecting at the next event, perhaps years later.

While generational lines are not strict in terms of connectivity, based on my observations, the trend among African women tends to follow the patterns presented in studies indicating that millennials are much more connected than the generations before them ("Millennials, A Portrait of Generation Next"; "15 Economic Facts about Millennials; "Millennials Breaking the Myth"). Moreover, at present, digital devices are marketed towards younger consumers in the same way as analogue film cameras were viewed as equipment for adults and, more particularly, as a professional tool, because the idea of making a film was not seen as being in the realm of adolescent activity. As such, giving a digital camera to facilitate girls to tell their stories and those of their community is a reflection of the DIY movement of user-friendly, low-budget modes of production, arising from new digital technologies, and the interconnectivity of the global village.

For instance, the UNICEF World Cup in My Village project leading up to the 2010 World Cup in South Africa was an inspiration to Aishah Umuhoza, a young participant in the

oneminutesjr. film project held in the Rubavu District of Rwanda. "I plan to be a professional camera woman, I will go back to my community and teach my colleagues how to make movies", she proclaimed ("UNICEF: Rwandan student films premier during FIFA World Cup 2010"). The project entailed a five-day intensive workshop during which the students learned to write a script and direct, shoot and edit a one-minute film, as well as act in the production.

As evident in the passionate words of Aishah Umuhoza, several girls have enthusiastically embraced the media-training project. The UNICEF World Cup in My Village *YouTube* channel provides a selection of the one-minute films produced during the film workshop, among which are the completed projects of Dancille Nyiranteziryayo and Mamy Manirakiza, two of the girls who participated.

Hence, initiatives such as this provide young people with the requisite skills to report on the important issues that they are dealing with in their communities and then share them with the international community. Thus, through new media platforms, the youth of Africa contribute to the flow of global exchange in unprecedented ways.

Belgium-based Monique Mbeka Phoba, who began her filmmaking career in the early 1990s with a small Hi8 camera, enthusiastically embraces new technologies and attests to their indispensability. While in Belgium working on a project with a co-producer, crew and actors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, most of the communication took place using new media. She had this to say:

> During my last film project that I coproduced with a team of young theatre students in Kinshasa, I must say that we greatly benefited from the virtual environment that is so much part of our world today. I met these youth who wanted to make films, and yet a film school does not exist in DRC. I offered to be part of the production of a film whose subject was proposed by one of them. Thus at the same time that they learned how to make a film they dealt with all the aspects of the production. Guy Kabeya Muya, who did the training, coproduced the film with me. We worked with small digital cameras, and communicated via Internet and SMS, so that I could follow the day-by-day production and give my input as needed.

Monique Mbeka Phoba's experience demonstrates the increasingly frequent coproduction and collaborative practices between Africans on the continent and in the global diaspora as well as the intergenerational exchange and sharing engendered by new technologies.

A Continuum: Sharing Knowledge, Giving Voice

Jennifer Radloff in *Feminist Africa*'s 2013 special issue on "e-spaces: e-politics" asserts that "the advent and development of the internet has expanded the frontiers of feminist activism." The online journal's own commitment serves as a model of what Radloff describes as "audacious digital engagements displayed by women's movements all over the world." The above mentioned special issue mirrors much of my findings and conclusions regarding the impact of new technologies on African women of the screen. Its concepts and analyses have been

useful for my prognosis for African women of the screen going forward.

The email lists and Yahoo discussion forums of the late 1990s to mid 2000s have extended to *Facebook* posts and *Twitter* feeds. While business cards and portfolios continue to be useful, websites, blogs and online video sharing serve to profile, introduce and interface with professionals. Faxing and emailing are being supplemented with "in-boxing" on *Facebook* and LinkedIn or messaging on *Twitter*. The use of Skype, teleconferencing and other visual synchronous dialogue devices are preferred to expensive phone calls, faxing and travelling for face-to-face meetings.

Thus, the digital age is indeed a turning point for African women working in film and screen media. The ubiquity of digital technologies has revolutionised African women's capacity to negotiate their space within screen cultures, it has extended the span of their network and redefined their relationship with knowledge production and sharing women's experiences, African realities and world issues.

Note

[1] Most are included in Ellerson's *Sisters of the Screen: Women of Africa on Film, Video and Television*.

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